ADWEEK
OCTOBER 2025

ADWEEK Brand Genius

ELIZABETH BANKS

FROM BLOCKBUSTERS TO BUILDING A CANNED WINE EMPIRE

+

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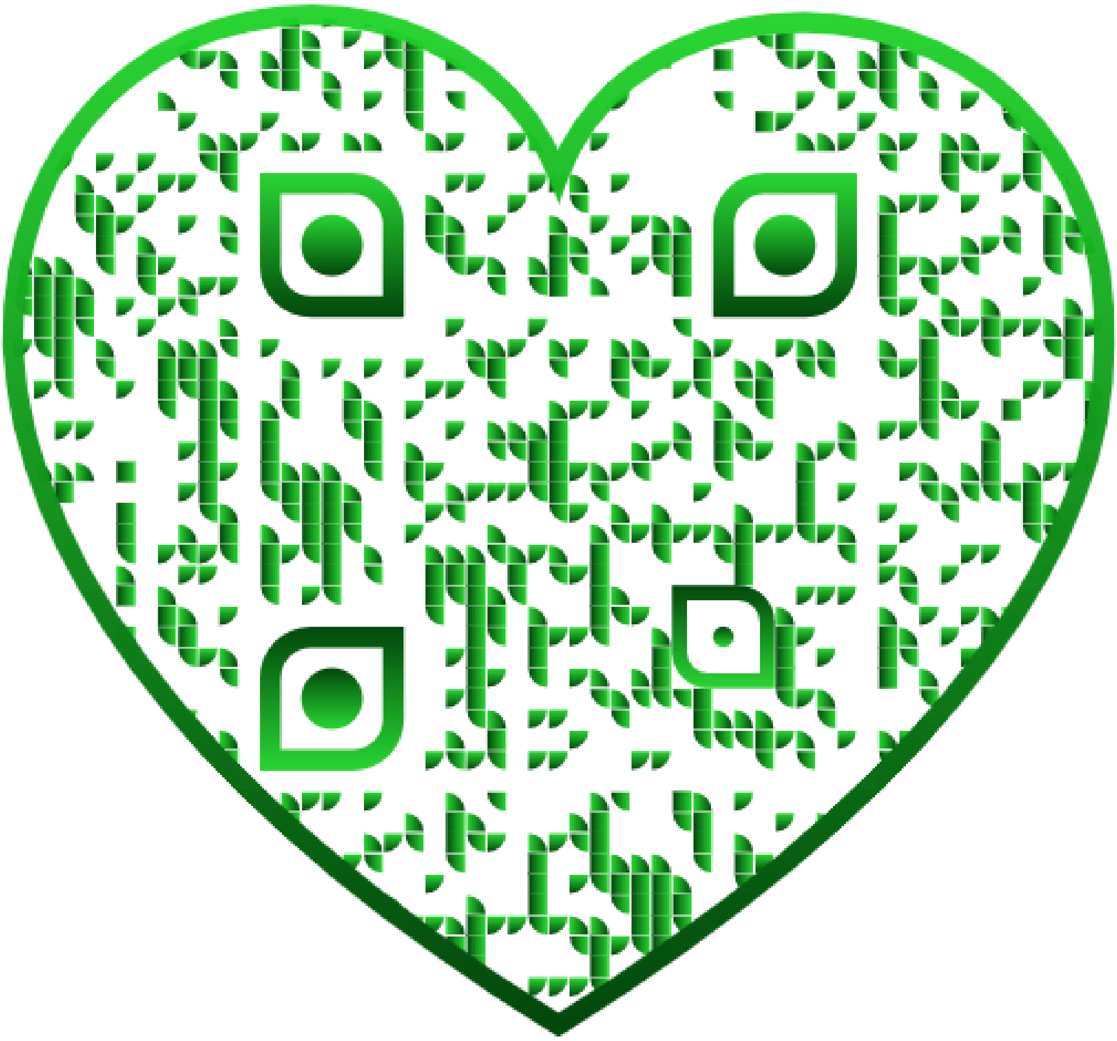
BRAND GENIUSES



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EXPLORE THIS ISSUE

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BRAND GENIUS

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Elizabeth Banks conquered the entertainment industry long ago, and went looking for something new in the brand world. The CCO of Archer Roose leads our Brand Genius class of 2025, a powerful group of leaders inspiring us not just with their work, but how they're tackling challenges within our industry and beyond.

BY ADWEEK STAFF

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MAKING THE DREAM

Industry awards often recognize individuals for a piece of work. But building an iconic brand, developing a groundbreaking campaign, or tackling a business challenge are team efforts. ADWEEK's inaugural Team Visionary Awards celebrate the groups behind big achievements.

BY BRANDON HARDIN

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VISIONARY AWARDS
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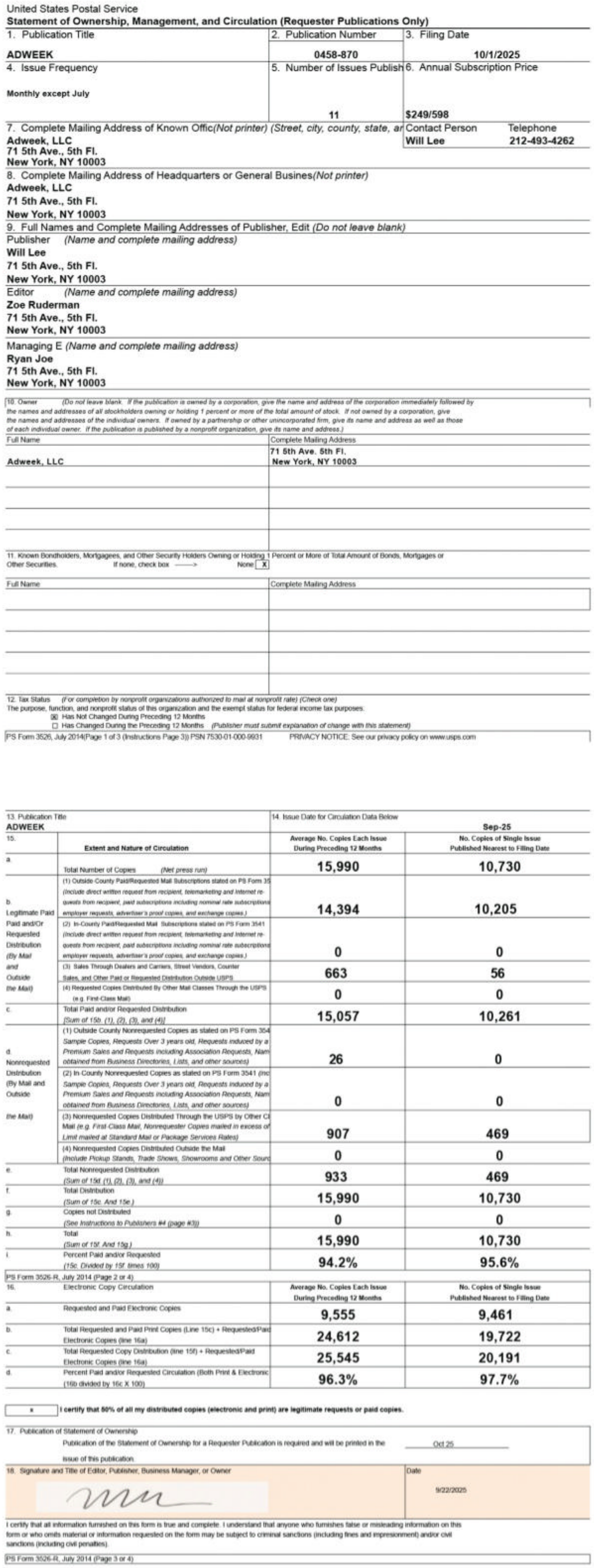

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GOING LONG ON SOCIAL

Brands big and very small are all in on episodic content. *By Elena Cavender*

ADWEEK/ADOBE STOCK

EPISODIC CONTENT IS not just for television anymore.

With algorithmic changes to TikTok and Instagram that make engagement and reach less predictable, marketers are moving from one-off partnerships with creators to episodic series. Brands like Argos, State Farm, and InStyle have recently developed series that capitalize on long-form storytelling, reflecting how platforms increasingly appear to reward multipart videos.

"It's getting harder to build an audience on TikTok and that audience isn't as valuable anymore, unless they are creating something that their audience is turning into," said Keith Bendes, chief strategy officer at influencer marketing platform Linqia.

According to influencer marketing agency Billion Dollar Boy, 68% of marketers have increased production of long-form creator content in the past 12 months, and 70% of marketers planned to increase production this year.

"You need to be entertaining to stand out. You're no longer competing against just your competitors," said creative director Rowland Smith. "You're competing against every other brand. You're competing against every creator that someone follows, meme accounts, videos of squirrels."

Episodic content goes hand-in-hand with another strategy growing in popularity: fostering long-term partnerships with creators. "It's much easier to have repeat content going out into the world if it's following a creative framework and story," said Noah Eisemann, global managing director of social and influencer at VML.

BRANDS GO LONG

In June, U.K. retailer Argos released Arghaüs, a mockumentary-style series focused on a fictional art gallery posted on Instagram Reels, TikTok, and YouTube Shorts. It consists of four two-minute long episodes shot by Studio Yes and developed by Billion Dollar Boy. It stars U.K. creators like Christopher Hall and Abi Clarke, and each episode introduces a new character portrayed by a creator. Arghaüs was born out of an entertainment-first point of view that allowed Argos to showcase its products, and has increased engagement on its owned accounts by 230%.

"Episodic content is really useful for brands because you can build a world, and once it's built, there are so many infinite directions that you can take it," said Billion Dollar Boy's Smith.

Fashion publication InStyle also chose a mockumentary format for The Intern, its social media series that follows the fictional story of interns at InStyle. The first season debuted in February and starred Grant Gibbs and Ashley Gill, known as "twink and a redhead" on TikTok. The episodes blend fictional characters with actual InStyle staff members, following the day-to-day tasks that interns have to do through a humorous lens.

The first episode of Season 3 came out Aug. 6 and has already received over 5 million views and 1.3 million likes. InStyle released the episodes just ahead of its fall issue, reaching 7 million people across its social platforms—99% of whom didn't follow InStyle.

"The goal for The Intern was to drum up some momentum for some of the big tentpole moments that we had coming," said editor in chief Sally Holmes.

The series is part of a larger strategy from InStyle owner People Inc., said Leah Wyar, president of entertainment, beauty and style. The publishing giant has another show planned, The Fourth Wall, which shares the behind-the-scenes of People's biggest stories, with e.l.f. Cosmetics as a sponsor.

And State Farm is about to move its 2022 series Gamerhood, a reality TV-style show on Twitch and YouTube where gaming creators compete in insurance mishap-inspired challenges, to streaming.

ANY BRAND CAN BE BIG ON SOCIAL

Brands don't have to have a huge influencer budget or even work with creators to take advantage of episodic content. Cody Larson, the owner of Little Joy Coffee in Northfield, Minn., stumbled into the success of episodic content on his coffee shop's Instagram page that has 65,000 followers.

Last winter, Larson launched an Instagram Reels series testing out new drink recipes until he found one to add to the winter menu. The series—a blend of two popular genres, recipes and reactions—went viral, and Little Joy's sales have been up 40% every month since then. Larson brought the series back ahead of Valentine's Day and is doing it again for his fall menu.

"Instagram knows you're doing episodic content, and brings in new viewers to your channel, but they're bringing them in earlier on at the series to hook the viewers," Larson said.

All the Rage

Rage bait is everywhere. Is it ever a good tactic?

By Robert Klara & Rebecca Stewart

RAGE BAIT, ONLINE content made to provoke and monetize fury, has dominated ad industry headlines as brands bet on riling up consumers—whether intentionally or not.

There's American Eagle's "Sydney Sweeney Has Great Jeans" campaign, which some critics charged has a whiff of eugenics. E.l.f Beauty partnered with comedian Matt Rife, who was reproached for making light of domestic violence in his 2023 Netflix special. And a $48 face shapewear band from Kim Kardashian's Skims was marketed by the star on Instagram as something to "snatch your little chinny chin chin," sparking a debate over selective beauty standards.

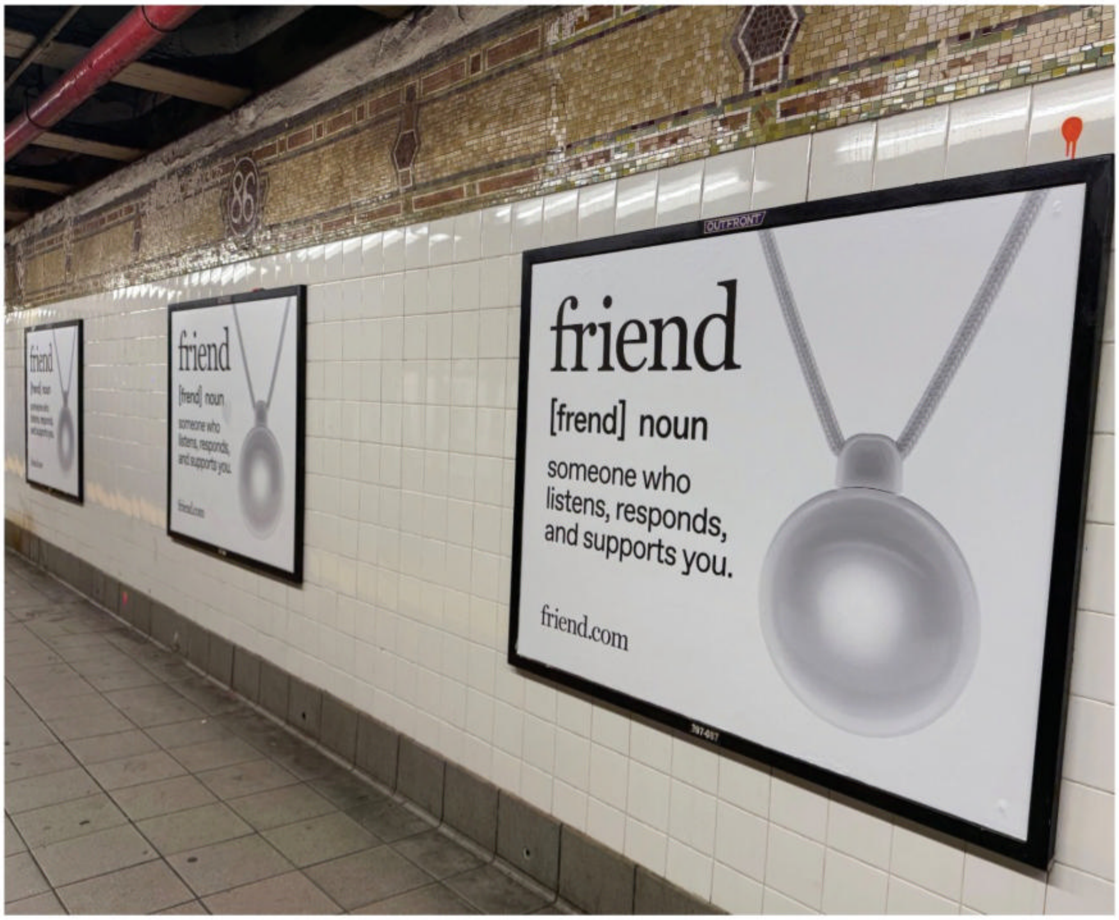
Swiss watchmaker Swatch, too, found itself in the crosshairs over a campaign in China that featured an Asian model pulling the corners of his eyes. After the brand pulled the image globally and apologized, one critic replied: "That wasn't a mistake, it was a deliberate display of supremacy and dominance over others, embedded in your marketing." In the U.K., Colgate-owned brand Sanex had an ad banned by regulators for "suggesting white skin was superior to Black skin."

And earlier this month, AI firm Friend blanketed a New York City subway station with ads for its wearable device that deliberately left white space for the predictably colorful thoughts New Yorkers would have on human-computer friendship.

What's going on here? Is this accidental controversy or calculated provocation?

Flora Joll, strategy director at indie creative shop Joan, noted that these "tone deaf" ads passed through hundreds of approvals before leaving corporate walls. "So a decision was either made to court controversy, or there was a collective lack of objectivity to epic proportions," she said.

While she doesn't believe the Sanex campaign was developed as rage bait, she said it shows brands need to work harder to put their audiences first. "If they are trying to cut through by being subversive, brand teams could ask themselves whether the short-term sales spikes justify the shadow cast in terms of long-term brand toxicity and bad PR," she added.



▲ AI startup Friend's subway ads in New York City seemed to invite commuters to share their displeasure with plenty of white space for graffiti.

ADWEEK; AMERICAN EAGLE, E.L.F. COSMETICS, GETTY IMAGES, FRIEND

HISTORY REPEATS ITSELF

But if Joll is correct about offensive ads getting the green light from executives who should know better, it begs a larger question: Why do marketers continue making these mistakes? Industry watchers suggest it's one of two reasons.

First, it really could be an honest goof. On occasion, "brands really do blunder into these controversies," said Mike Kresch, vice president of strategy for digital marketing agency Moburst. In the race to stand out, "sometimes brands simply try too hard, and the result is a blunder that has repercussions."

But those instances are the minority, according to Benjamin Felix, president of content marketing firm Decision Counsel. "When a brand touches a third rail — race, sex, genetics, identity — it's rarely an accident," he said. "These aren't topics you stumble into. Brands understand the risk. But in a world where traditional brand-building no longer guarantees relevance, many are willing to gamble."

MONETIZE THE FURY

Whether on purpose or by accident, however, wading into the culture wars can have real business consequences.

Sweeney's blue jeans and the discourse around them (including comments from President Trump) have sent American Eagle's share price up 45% in the past month.

The clothier doubled down on its campaign with a statement saying it "was always about the jeans," e.l.f conceded its partnership with Rife "missed the mark." Skims, meanwhile, has continued posting as usual following the debut of its wrap.

RISKS AND REWARDS

As it turns out, courting controversy isn't just a dangerous game but most of the time a pointless one.

"Visibility is a metric that many brands use to evaluate success," said Ian Baer, founder of marketing intelligence company Sooth. "But most data show that there's little to no direct link between visibility and sales, especially when the message that draws the most attention is just as likely to offend."

"Even when controversy does generate profits, it's only temporary," added Eric Yaverbaum, CEO of Ericho Communications and the author of Public Relations for Dummies. "A particularly bad story can haunt a brand months and even years down the line, nullifying whatever short-term benefit a little controversy may have stirred up. In my 44 years in this industry, I don't think I've ever seen this tactic pay off in the end."

Of course, the best remedy for public rage is not outraging the public to start with. But that's not always easy when a brand demands that its creative team be edgy and court attention, particularly within today's media overload.

Ultimately, there's no single safeguard, but having a CMO with culturally sensitive radar isn't a bad idea.

"CEOs are responsible to their boards and shareholders, and the last thing they want to do is see a performance drop as a result of an avoidable controversy," Kresch said. "CMOs and VPs of marketing, in turn, play the delicate game of balancing creativity with caution."

ROBERT KLARA *is the senior editor of brands and* **REBECCA STEWART** *is the U.K. brands editor at* **ADWEEK.**

DAVIS-WOODHALL

Nike Changes the Game (Again)

"Just Do It" undergoes its latest transformation, this time to motivate the anxious generation.

By Brittaney Kiefer

Tara Davis-Woodhall (left) and Vini Jr. are among the new faces in Nike's "Why Do It" campaign.

NIKE

FOR NEARLY FOUR decades, Nike has been telling people to "Just Do It." Now, the brand has reworked its iconic tagline, flipping it into a question: "Why Do It?"

The major new campaign is meant to rally the next generation—a very different one than the audience who first heard the words "Just Do It" 37 years ago. Amid a broader brand turnaround effort, Nike is inviting young athletes to write the next chapter of its legacy.

The "Why Do It?" campaign, created by Wieden+Kennedy Portland, kicked off in September to coincide with the start of many sports seasons including the NFL. Narrated by Tyler, the Creator, the ad features a diverse group of athletes from across the sports worlds of basketball, football, baseball, soccer, tennis, diving, and racing, including Caitlin Clark, Saquon Barkley, Carlos Alcaraz, Qinwen Zheng, and Rayssa Leal. Each is wrestling with their own purpose and must answer, "Why Do It?"

Nike's fresh take on "Just Do It" reframes greatness as a choice, rather than a given outcome. It speaks to a young generation that is "hesitant to get out there because of this fear of perfectionism," Nicole Graham, Nike's executive vice president and chief marketing officer, told ADWEEK. "As we talk with young athletes, it's just an absolute pressure cooker of comparison, trying to be perfect, fear of failing, and fear of even trying in many cases."

The film captures athletes not in the glory of winning, but at the moment they choose to take a risk: kicking a ball, taking a swing, diving off a board.

"The whole idea of 'Why Do It?' is about taking that first step and actually doing it," Graham said. "We wanted to give voice to those doubts, but very clearly give an answer: do it and look what happens."

RETURNING TO RELEVANCE

In recent years, Nike has faced sluggish sales and declining brand value, while struggling to compete with legacy rivals such as Adidas and upstart brands like On and Hoka that appeal to Gen Z. "We weren't as sharp and clear on our values as a company," Graham said.

Over the last 18 months, Nike has embarked on a marketing transformation to reclaim its relevance. In November 2023, the company brought back Graham, who'd previously been at Nike for 17 years before starting her own agency, as CMO. In October 2024, Elliott Hill, another longtime Nike veteran, returned as CEO, replacing John Donahoe.

Then earlier this year, after Nike's full 2025 fiscal year revenue fell 10% year-over-year to $46.3 billion, Hill announced the company would shift its focus from lifestyle marketing to performance wear through a new strategy called Sport Offense, which works in tandem with its Win Now turnaround plan.

As part of that turnaround, Nike reorganized its business to be segmented by sports, rather than the men's, women's, and children's categories. Its "Winning Isn't Comfortable" campaign last year championed runners along marathon routes. In February, Nike returned to the Super Bowl after 27 years with "So Win," a celebration of female athletes.

The sports-focused strategy is driving "real momentum" for the business, according to Graham. "What we have tried to do as a brand is reaffirm we are in love with winning, but winning is relative to whatever you're trying to do in your life. There's no straight linear path, and there's many ways to get there," she added. "This latest campaign [shows] how winning and greatness and potential is all about a choice."

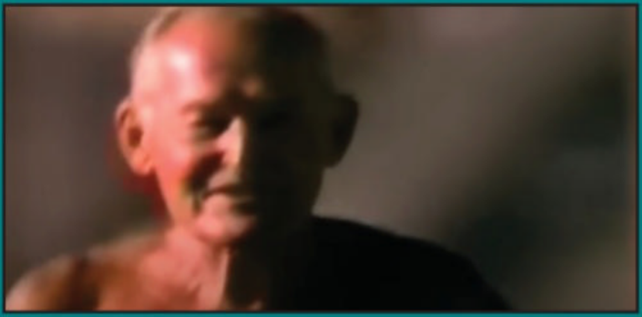
BRITTANEY KIEFER *is the creativity editor at* **ADWEEK.**

A TAGLINE THAT MOVES WITH CULTURE

Since Nike and Wieden+Kennedy introduced "Just Do It" nearly four decades ago, it has become one of the most famous brand slogans of all time, embodied by legendary athletes including Michael Jordan, Serena Williams, Tiger Woods, and Kobe Bryant.

"Those are three very precious words to us," Graham said. "Those words have taken on different meanings based on what's going on in culture."

Here's a timeline of the tagline's three biggest moments, showing how the message has evolved to meet the moment.



1988: The first "Just Do It" ad showed 80-year-old runner Walt Stack jogging across the Golden Gate Bridge, demonstrating that sports are for everyone.

1995: "If You Let Me Play" extended that message to girls and young women by showing how sports could change their lives.

2018: For the 30th anniversary of "Just Do It," Nike took a bold stance by featuring former NFL quarterback Colin Kaepernick, who had stirred controversy with his on-field protest of racial injustice, in its "Dream Crazy" ad.

‘THE MOST FASCINATING EXPERIENCE’

American Eagle CMO Craig Brommers was looking for drama — and got it.

BEFORE SYDNEY SWEENEY and her genes/jeans came along, American Eagle CMO Craig Brommers thought he’d already experienced the most harrowing brand moment of his professional career.

A 25-year veteran of the industry, he was head of marketing at Speedo during the years when Michael Phelps dominated swimming at the Olympics: Sydney in 2000, Athens in 2004 — then the record-breaking eight gold medals at the 2008 Beijing Olympics. The difference? Speedo.

“That 2008 Beijing Olympics campaign was incredibly intense,” he recalled on Adspeak, the ADWEEK industry podcast hosted by editor in chief Ryan Joe.

“We developed a full-body swimsuit called the LZR Racer with NASA, and this suit led to all sorts of records being broken.”

The technology proved incredibly controversial, dominating news headlines around the world. Ultimately, the suits were banned, and Brommers went on to work at Abercrombie & Fitch and Gap, landing at AE in 2020. Then came the summer of Sydney Sweeney.

Brommers shared his experience of being in the eye of the media hurricane; listen to the full episode at adweek.com.

This transcript has been edited for clarity and space.

WHY DENIM?

“So goes jeans, so goes American Eagle. As you may remember, ‘23 into ‘24, denim was having a moment in a very big way. And there were so many fashion brands up and down the landscape that were participating. And we really felt like we needed to make sure that we recaptured people’s imagination.”

WHY SYDNEY SWEENEY?

Brommers calls the back-to-school shopping season the Super Bowl of denim. “The brief was very clear: Let’s get the It Girl of 2025. Every key American retailer is bringing their A game for this particular period, and we wanted to level up and bring the best game that American Eagle has ever brought. She was perfect for this American Eagle campaign because she is this wonderful mix of aspiration and everyday, something that really fits our brand.”

THE EXPECTATIONS:

“We knew that this was a more provocative campaign than American Eagle had done in recent history. And that would also get people talking. For the first few days, it was really a celebratory mood around the campaign. Then there were some absurd claims about the campaign. I actually felt like I was living in alternate universes because what I was seeing and hearing on social media, and to some [extent] the mainstream media, was very different than the business and customer performance metrics.”

THE TAKEAWAY:

“I really think social media noise is one thing, but customer performance is really what you should be basing your decisions on. So this is not about emotions, it’s about facts and data. And because of that, we were able to confidently execute this campaign. I think that ‘Sydney Sweeney Has Great Jeans’ is the prime example that marketing works. In this case, marketing drove culture, product sales, stock price.”

WHAT’S NEXT?

“The [marketing] mandate is clear: We’ve got to continue to drive buzz and we’ve got to continue to drive the business. From a driving the buzz perspective, I have the permission to make big swings. We have the swagger to take big swings, and you’re going to see that with talent, with music, with sports, with experiences as well.”

WOULD YOU DO ANYTHING DIFFERENTLY?

“I really believe things happen for a reason. You can tell yourself you’re managing a crisis, or you can tell yourself you are optimizing an opportunity, and we chose the latter, and that has been the mindset that we will continue to have.”

BIGGEST LESSON?

“The first one is social media noise is intense, and it’s hard not to listen and not to react, but sometimes not doing anything is actually the smartest strategy possible. And just looking at factual, accurate, real-time data and making decisions based on that is way more important than the swirl of social media.”

TRUE PARTNERSHIP:

“When you decide to partner with boldface talent, you have to live up to the essence of what that means. It’s a partnership. In our specific case, Sydney Sweeney stuck with us. We stuck with her. And because of that, I think that it allowed both brands to come out of this experience even stronger.”

WOULD YOU DO IT AGAIN?

“The results speak for themselves. I get paid to deliver shareholder value. I get paid to create memorable experiences for our customers. I get to reflect the values of our brand and our corporation. And I think that these campaigns [with Sweeney and Travis Kelce] both did that.”

The President vs. Tylenol

The Kenvue brand's crisis is loud. The solution is not.

PHOTO ILLUSTRATION: TRENT JOAQUIN; WIN MCNAMEE/GETTY IMAGES; ANDY DEAN/ADOBE STOCK

DONALD TRUMP HAS given Kenvue, the maker of Tylenol, an almighty headache. Citing an unsubstantiated link to autism, the president made global headlines by discouraging pregnant women from using the drug. Describing the situation as a "horrible, horrible crisis" and Tylenol as "not good," Trump outlined plans to limit the drug's future indications.

Medical experts and health authorities worldwide have roundly rejected the claim, insisting that acetaminophen — the generic name for Tylenol — remains a safe and essential treatment for pain and fever during pregnancy. But the fallout saw Kenvue, which also manufactures other staples like Band-Aid and Listerine, scrambling to respond as its share price dropped by almost 10%.

It's been common in recent years to cite all publicity as somehow good for brand building and sales. "Hey," goes the inane argument, "at least people are talking about us, right?" But while it's certainly true that marketers have often overstated the perils of negative media coverage and the odd inconsistent moment, there is no doubt that certain crises can indeed hurt brand equity and seriously damage sales. Tylenol's crisis is right up there on the pain index.

The criticism is also peculiarly targeted on the brand, not the category. Trump, who struggled to pronounce "acetaminophen" in his announcement, focused on the Tylenol brand instead and name checked it eight times.

And then there is the direct contradiction of a brand built on safe, trusted pain relief suddenly being declared a dangerous, risky cause of one of America's most mysterious conditions.

But this isn't Tylenol's first existential crisis. In 1982, seven Chicagoans died after taking cyanide-laced Tylenol, triggering mass panic and a near-total collapse in consumer confidence.

Johnson & Johnson, then Tylenol's parent, undertook what is now regarded as the textbook response: pulling 31 million bottles off shelves, halting all advertising, engaging the media with candor, and introducing tamper-proof packaging.

It became the classic playbook for modern crisis management — swift action, radical transparency, and consumer safety prioritized over cost. Within a year, Tylenol's market share recovered completely, and the company's reputation soared as an exemplar of corporate ethics.

THAT WAS THEN, THIS IS NOW

Crisis managers may be inclined to quote the events of 1982 and recommend that Tylenol once again take action immediately to acknowledge the problem and either counter or comply with the president's claims.

But 2025 isn't 1982. And medical misinformation from a politically motivated president isn't the same as product tampering.

Too often, brand strategy is conducted at breakneck speed, overly focused on action and reaction. That's not always wise. After all, strategy, according to the revered consultant and economist Michael Porter, is the art of deciding what not to do.

When you break down case studies in an MBA course, it's imperative to supplement all the students' frenzied suggestions with a final oft-forgotten option: doing nothing. This is still a strategic choice — and often the smart one.

In this case, Trump's claim is so at odds with the scientific consensus, and so clearly political, that any direct engagement risks inadvertently elevating the controversy. Tylenol is not in possession of new information; all previous studies have been reviewed ad nauseam by regulators worldwide.

The medical establishment, academic community, and international health agencies have already spoken in unison to debunk the assertion. A statement from Tylenol would likely only refresh and legitimize a baseless news cycle and risks infuriating a president who, thanks to his mentor Roy Cohn, rewards resistance with a ten-fold escalation.

Sometimes, letting the experts — and time — do the work is more effective, especially when a brand's safety record is long-established and the accusation at hand is patently unscientific. By holding the line and letting the flurry of outrage expend itself, Tylenol stands to remind consumers of the dull power of expertise, not panic.

Sometimes, silence is not weakness but wisdom. And inaction does not always signify laziness or uncertainty. In an ironic twist, the bravest, wisest course for Tylenol may well be to endure the pain in silence.

MARK RITSON

Founder, MiniMBA

Brand Genius
ADWEEK

After years of crisis moments that left brand leaders struggling just to keep up, 2025 has been a chance to shine. Between technological leaps and companies looking for new ways to woo fragmented audiences, marketers are bravely rewriting their playbooks — because it seems the only risk is not taking a chance.

Our 2025 Brand Genius honorees stand out for their willingness to embrace new ideas and go places their brands have never been seen before. Whether it's a legacy brand reinventing its business model or a film director putting on a Hollywood-sized pitch for brand collaborators, these 11 marketing leaders are challenging the idea of what brands "should" do and charging forward, trusting their audiences to follow.

From Hollywood Hits to Canned Rosé, *Elizabeth Banks* Blurs the Lines Between *Entertainment* and *Marketing*

By Kendra Barnett

JOHN RUSSO PHOTO

'I feel like you're a canned wine person'

ELIZABETH BANKS IS finally back home in L.A. after seven months in Toronto shooting Peacock's forthcoming The Miniature Wife, a dark comedy series that Banks both stars in and produced alongside Succession's Matthew Macfadyen.

It's her latest project in a busy year, with the buzzy May release of Amazon's drama series The Better Sister, in which Banks co-starred with Jessica Biel, and a September campaign launch for cosmetics label No7, a brand she has fronted since 2023. Not to mention the meteoric rise of canned wine brand Archer Roose, which Banks co-owns and promotes as chief creative officer.

Unlike most of her roles, the latter is one she may have manifested. The multihyphenate actor-director-producer-comedian, known for her work on blockbusters like The Hunger Games and television shows including 30 Rock, was moodboarding with a handful of girlfriends on a weekend trip just before the pandemic.

"We were approaching middle age. Our kids were getting older. We were a little bummed out," she said. They were all pondering what the next stage of their lives would look like. Banks found herself inserting an image of Glaceau Smartwater on her board. "I was like, 'What's my Smartwater? What's my version of that? I feel like there's something out there that I can authentically get behind.'"

By that point, Banks had long outgrown the limited label of "actor." She'd established herself as a force to be reckoned with in entertainment, having launched Brownstone Productions in 2002 with husband Max Handelman, taking on major projects from the Pitch Perfect franchise to the 2023 breakout Emma Seligman flick Bottoms. Along the way, Banks also began directing, with a slate of rollicking feature-length films like Charlie's Angels and the notorious horror-comedy Cocaine Bear.

She has also worked extensively in advertising, inking national brand partnerships with Old Navy and Reator.com in the 2010s, and later applying her directorial skills in a Super Bowl commercial for Persil ProClean in 2017 and a playful 2021 spot for Cadillac.

Still, Banks was looking for a piece of the brand landscape she could own more wholly — and that truly reflected her interests and values.

It took a few years, but that piece arrived in the form of a sleek aluminum can with a moose printed on the front. One of her agents had texted her, saying: "'Don't take this the wrong way. I don't want to offend you, but I feel like you're a canned wine person,'" Banks recalled, laughing.

She wasn't offended, having long felt put off by traditional wine culture. "The way I grew up, expensive wine was not a thing," Banks said. "It was culturally separate from me in that it felt a little pretentious. I always felt talked down to, like I didn't know enough about wine."

After a glowing review from her sister and a meeting with Archer Roose co-founder Marian Leitner-Waldman, Banks was all in. She became a co-owner and CCO in 2021.

MORE THAN THE BRAND FACE

The wine brand announced Banks' appointment in a playfully rogue ad campaign launched in October 2021, made by the Boston-based creative shop Colossus. In the spot, the actor shows up unannounced in Leitner-Waldman's home and quickly makes herself a permanent fixture, chugging Archer Roose wines from the fridge, clipping her toenails in the sink, and staying overnight. Before Leitner-Waldman can catch her breath, Banks owns half the company.

"The recurring personas in our ads of Elizabeth as the 'famous person' and me as the 'business person' are exaggerated parodies of how we collaborate in real life," Leitner-Waldman said.

"She knows the modern consumer doesn't care about terroir and tannins. They care about drinking a high-quality wine, served in an accessible format that fits their lifestyle, and she helps us get that message across in a witty, fun, down-to-earth way that's uniquely her."

ARCHER ROOSE WINES, ALI GOLDSTEIN/NBCU

Elizabeth Banks with Tina Fey in the NBC series 30 Rock.

‘I’m touching everything with a little bit of that wink and nod’

Now, as a part owner, Banks is fully embedded in the business, involved in decisions on everything from distribution strategies and winemaker partnerships to brand positioning and marketing.

Since her entry, Archer Roose has made major strides. In 2022, it secured investment from Constellation Brands, the beverage giant behind Corona, Modelo, and Kim Crawford wines. It’s available in all 50 U.S. states, and its wines have picked up a handful of industry awards. Last year, it grew by double digits and sold over 100,000 cases. This spring, it unveiled its first pinot noir.

Much of the acceleration has been driven by expansion into direct-to-consumer sales as well as distribution in new venues, such as Regal Cinemas, Dave & Busters, and Princess Cruises. Five years ago, Archer Roose inked a deal with JetBlue to carry a single variety, which has since expanded to owning the airline’s entire wine selection and a signature Skyhigh Spritz wine cocktail.

Banks’ background as a Hollywood mainstay has only buoyed the brand. Not only has her role as its face aided growth; she’s also drawn inspiration from the complex process of filmmaking in building the Archer Roose business alongside Leitner-Waldman.

“Every film is like launching its own brand or product,” she said. “We create a product, and it’s got widgets and all the things that go into it, and we have a production line, and we’ve got partnerships, and we’ve got collaborators. We also have to understand who the end consumer is, and why we’re making the thing, why we’re staying passionate about it. How do we then tell that story to the end consumer and get them to buy in?

“The thought process behind it all [has] a lot of crossover. A lot of it is really about a vision, a voice, and a story.”

It’s a process she’s also mastered with No7, the U.K. skincare and beauty giant. As the brand’s first U.S. celebrity ambassador, she has tied the label to her own personal experiences, speaking candidly about the value of sleep and self-care, and the benefits of integrating No7 products into her own routine. That alignment makes her pitch feel authentic, just as it has with Archer Roose.

FUSING THE PERSONAL AND THE COMMERCIAL

Over the years, Banks feels that the Archer Roose brand has become intimately linked to her own personal brand.

One part of that picture is Banks’ commitment to women-led and focused projects. Earlier in her career, she collaborated with the American Heart Association to help raise awareness of heart disease in women, directing and fronting the organization’s 2011 short film Just a Little Heart Attack. She’s been an outspoken supporter of abortion access, has advocated on behalf of nonprofit Dress for Success for equipping women in need with professional attire, and in 2016 established WhoHaha, a digital platform spotlighting women comedians.

Her decision to join Archer Roose was informed, in part, by her commitment to women-led work.

“It means so much to me to be in this incredible group of women who want to be leaders in the spirits industry,” she said. “This is an industry where there are not a lot of women leaders.”

Most importantly, Banks believes that her own talent can help redefine what good wine looks like.

“Entertaining people is what I do 99% of the time,” she said. “I’m bringing that core skill to everything that we put out, and touching everything with a little bit of that wink and nod, that little sense of, ‘We know we’re trying to sell you something, but we do have a great product.’

“We take the wine really seriously. That’s Marian’s part of it. But we don’t take ourselves too seriously, and that’s my part of it.”

KENDRA BARNETT *is the senior tech reporter at* **ADWEEK.**

Seth *Rogen* Evan *Goldberg* Michael *Mohr*

HOUSEPLANT & POINT GREY

SETH ROGEN HAS turned a knack for good jokes — and good joints — into a pair of thriving businesses. Along with his longtime creative partner Evan Goldberg and entrepreneur Michael Mohr, Rogen co-leads Point Grey Pictures, the production studio behind series like The Studio, as well as Houseplant, the cannabis and design brand that made waves with a sexy ashtray.

With Point Grey, the team is looking to build on the success of The Studio, which offers a winking send-up of Hollywood in the streaming era. Following a rave reception from audiences and nine Emmy Award wins, Goldberg says projects they had dreamed of for years are suddenly getting the green light. “We always wanted to branch into other genres, and this has gotten things moving,” he said.

In addition to beginning work on the second season of The Studio, Point Grey recently penned a production deal with the Canadian broadcaster Bell Media and is at work filming a Muppets special. “We just try to make things good that honor the material in the best way we can,” said Rogen.

Houseplant is equally ambitious. The brand has built a cult following with Rogen’s patented ashtray set, along with furniture and home goods that merge high design with high times. On the cannabis side, the company launched a THC-infused sparkling water in the U.S., which aims to crack the “fourth category” alongside beer, wine, and spirits. “It’s a Trojan horse for premium products,” Mohr says, and its success has pushed Houseplant to expand into everything from bar carts to directors chairs.

Together, the trio are proving that good taste — whether in décor, design, or comedy — is always in demand. “We’ve spent a lot of time building Houseplant and are excited about the work we put out into the world,” said Mohr, “so it’s nice to get that recognition.” *Mark Stenberg*

HOUSEPLANT, BUILD-A-BEAR

Sharon Price John

PRESIDENT & CEO, *Build-A-Bear Workshop*

WHEN SHARON PRICE John took over as CEO of Build-A-Bear Workshop in 2013, the brand was beloved but the business was broken. Stores were unprofitable, overhead was out of line, and inventory piled up.

"My first priority was not about reshaping the brand's future. My first priority was a return to profitability," John said. "The immediate actions in a turnaround situation are two-pronged: stop doing stupid stuff, followed by start doing smart stuff."

Once profitability returned, she set her focus on the brand itself. "Build-A-Bear is a feeling, right? Build-A-Bear means memories, family, hugs, hearts, warmth," she said.

That reframing allowed her to position Build-A-Bear as more than a mall retailer, "pivoting the company from a retailer that accidentally built a brand to a branded intellectual property company that happens to have vertical retail as one of its revenue streams," John explained.

One early symbolic step came in 2013, when she pushed to put the Build-A-Bear logo on every bear's paw — a simple but powerful move that reinforced the brand's identity beyond its stores.

The company has since expanded into ecommerce, licensing, entertainment, and international markets. Adults now make up a significant portion of sales, with John pointing to initiatives like the Bear Cave microsite. "We used and built out the website to overindex with collectors and adults and gift givers, and allowed the stores to be still that experience base where we overindex with our core consumer of kids," she said.

After guiding Build-A-Bear through the retail apocalypse, Brexit, and Covid-19, John takes pride in its resilience. "We're very careful to not overstep the trust that we built all these years, and we hope that we can be of service in bigger ways," she said. "At the end of the day, everybody needs a teddy bear hug." *Audrey Kemp*

Jon
M. Chu

FILM DIRECTOR
CCO, *Weee!*

FOR FILM DIRECTOR Jon M. Chu, everything comes back to storytelling. Whether it's taking moviegoers into the glitzy world of Crazy Rich Asians, translating Oz from Broadway to silver screen for Wicked, or directing a dance-infused Microsoft Surface Pro ad, Chu knows the work only resonates if it's grounded in truth, character, and heart. Which is really the only way to approach two of his upcoming projects, starring two very famous products: "I can't make a movie about Hot Wheels. I can't make a movie about Play-Doh. But I can make a movie about what they mean to us, whether that is play, creation, curiosity, friendship," Chu said.

That belief in the power of storytelling started early. Growing up in the Bay Area, Chu was inspired by Steve Jobs' triumphant return to Apple in 1997, with his goal for the tech company laid bare in the Chiat/Day "Think Different" campaign. "It wasn't about products; it was about philosophy," Chu recalled of the ad, which he can recite. Watching Apple transform from near-collapse to one of the world's most valuable companies showed him the power of narrative to reshape reality.

With Wicked, Chu knew the films' story would begin long before audiences took their seats in theaters. Universal's juggernaut marketing campaign that bathed the world in green and pink tie-in merchandise in the fall of 2024 began on the Emerald City soundstage, where Chu and producer Marc Platt magicked up a Wicked Fair to immerse potential brand partners in the movie's world before crafting their themed products.

Alongside his Hollywood career, Chu also uses his storytelling skills as the creative director of online Asian grocer Weee!, refreshing its brand identity and marketing the foods of his childhood to customers beyond the diaspora. "The merger of artistry and commerce," he said, "has always been interesting." *Eva Kis*

SOPHY HOLLAND FOR UNIVERSAL, SAGE EAST

AS A VETERAN marketer and Real Housewives of Beverly Hills star, Bozoma Saint John didn't hesitate when Jimmy Fallon invited her to join his new advertising competition show, On Brand. "When Jimmy first pitched me the idea, I literally said, 'Well duh, this is my entire life.' Regardless of what job I've had, people I saw in airports or the grocery store or a cocktail party have always pitched me ideas."

While others may bristle at such unsolicited attention, Saint John appreciates the "constant idea generation" from everyday people. Now, the former marketing leader for brands including Netflix, Uber, and Apple Music will encourage that creative impulse in others as a mentor and judge on Fallon's show, in which contestants pitch campaign ideas to brands. The show underscores how "marketing and advertising is no longer a closed door industry," she said. "Talent really can come from anywhere."

Openness has been a hallmark of Saint John's evolving career, from acting to the C-suite. Most recently, she launched Eve by Boz, a wigs and haircare brand designed to transform the hair extensions industry. She credits discipline and cultural agility with her success. "If you're not successful on social media as a brand, you've failed. You have to be quick," she said. "This is the era of marketers who react best."

Equally important has been cultivating her own identity as a marketer. "In the past, as a marketer you'd have to be a jack of all trades. Developing my own brand persona has allowed me to focus on the areas I'm really good at," she said.

After years of shaping the narrative for others, Saint John is ready to spotlight her own.

"I want to continue down this path, being in front of the camera, and perhaps some producing," she said. "I'm a storyteller through and through."

Brittaney Kiefer

Bozoma *Saint John*

FOUNDER & CEO, *Eve by Boz*

Allyson *Felix*

FOUNDER
Always Alpha

DESPITE RETIRING FROM track and field in 2022, Allyson Felix is still going for gold with Always Alpha.

With the help of her co-founders — Dolphin Entertainment CEO Bill O'Dowd, her brother and fellow sprinter Wes Felix, and Always Alpha CEO Cosette Chaput — the Olympic legend and entrepreneur launched Always Alpha in October 2024 as the first talent management firm fully focused on women's sports. Since its launch, the company has grown to represent two reigning league MVPs (Temwa Chawinga in the NWSL and Kelsey Robinson Cook in LOVB), WNBPA president and former WNBA MVP Nneka Ogwumike, and a roster of women with 22 Olympic medals between them, as well as acumen in business, media, and culture.

Felix's company continues to help its clients break new ground, including Mel Reid and Kira Dixon launching Quiet Please! on iHeart's first Women's Sports Audio Network as full IP owners; the Shib Sibs returning to the ice with Olympic partners such as P&G, Delta, and Ralph Lauren; and Chawinga and Robinson Cook securing multiple new multi-year sponsorships.

"What excites me most is that these aren't isolated wins," Felix said. "They signal a larger shift."

Moving forward, Always Alpha is focused on building deeper partnerships in industries that haven't fully leaned into women's sports, especially in beauty, lifestyle, and wellness, as well as expanding into more athlete-led content and prepping for global moments, such as the Los Angeles Olympics and the 2026 World Cup.

"What also matters is that this isn't charity; it's smart business," Felix said. "Women's sports is one of the most undervalued growth markets out there, and we're proving that when women are given the right platform, they deliver impact, influence, and return far beyond the game."
Bill Bradley

ELIZABETH CARABABAS, NETFLIX

Marian *Lee*

CMO, *Netflix*

ALREADY A CULTURAL juggernaut in television and live events, this year Netflix expanded its sphere of influence to Broadway with Stranger Things: The First Shadow, which won three Tony Awards. On the small screen, the streamer keeps producing breakout hits like Adolescence, a harrowing series that swept the Emmys with eight wins.

As Netflix's marketing leader, Marian Lee's strategy lies in creating meaningful ways for audiences to connect with each other and the characters they love. "Fandom doesn't turn off after you've binged a show," Lee said. "When you engage so deeply in a story or feel so connected to a character, you want to be immersed in the universe."

That belief has shaped Lee's career. After stints at J.Crew and Condé Nast, she joined Netflix in 2021 as vp of U.S. and Canada marketing before rising to CMO, bringing the same clarity she honed across consumer brands: Know your fans, meet them where they are, and give them more of what they love.

The most recent example of a campaign that captured her culture-driven mantra was KPop Demon Hunters, which not only became Netflix's most-watched film of all time this summer but also spun off a record-breaking soundtrack. Its hit single "Golden" is the longest-running No. 1 by an animated act in Billboard history.

The job, Lee stresses, isn't just about scale but resonance. "It's about moments of pure fan joy," she said. Whether that's 18 million views for a One Piece Lego announcement or 10 million attendees across 40 live experiences, Netflix's marketing ambition is clear—to entertain the world, and keep audiences connected long after the credits roll."
Trishla Ostwal

Kat *Cole*

CEO
AG1

KAT COLE STARTER her career as a Hooters Girl — a position she describes as the closest she's ever gotten to a formal marketing role. She spent 14 years at Hooters, first training employees, then expanding the restaurant to international markets, and making her way up to vice president by age 26. From there, she moved to Cinnabon, eventually leading the cinnamon roll maker's parent company, Focus Brands, as president and COO, overseeing all of its seven brands.

Now, as CEO of health supplement maker AG1, Cole can point to a continuous brand building ethos that has served as the foundation of her leadership, starting in those early days at Hooters. "Building a brand is about a promise that you are making and looking to keep — and exceed — to people who care," Cole explained. "There are people who did not want to go to Hooters, and I was not trying to make a promise to them."

The same was true at Cinnabon, and now at AG1. Cole is focused on staying true to the commitments that her brand has made to its core audience, while ensuring that it's evolving to meet the changing demands of that audience. "What you're really always optimizing for is relevance and differentiation," she noted.

Just over a year ago, AG1 brought in former Yeti CMO Paulie Dery to build a stronger storytelling component to the brand, focusing on its core consumers and investing in the communities that are obsessed with the product. The company also expanded from exclusively DTC into retail and ecommerce, moving into Amazon and Costco. Just last month, AG1 launched its first new product in 15 years, a nighttime complement to its core morning powdered supplement. "It's very tempting to go wide — lots of products, lots of stores, lots of commercials," she said. "And the right way is to stay deep with your core. Remarry your core."
Kathryn Lundstrom

AG1: HUNTER MORENO

CLOUD 23
Hot Sauce
CLOUD 23
Hot Sauce

Brooklyn *Peltz Beckham*

FOUNDER, *Cloud23*

IN THE DARK days of the pandemic, millions of Americans quarantined at home, streaming videos and shopping online. Brooklyn Peltz Beckham found himself in the kitchen. "My wife and I were having a bottle of wine together," the Englishman-turned-Angeleno said. Peltz Beckham already knew how to cook and, on this buzzed and fateful occasion, tried his hand at hot sauce, producing a credible sweet jalapeño. "I was like, 'Oh wait, there might be something here,'" and there was. Condiment brand Cloud23's inaugural pair of sauces are on shelves at Whole Foods. (The 23 is a nod to father David Beckham, who taught his eldest to cook and wore the number playing for Real Madrid and LA Galaxy.)

Celebrities launch brands all the time, of course, but the distinguishing rarity of Cloud23 is Peltz Beckham's preference to stay mostly behind the scenes. "I didn't want it to be a celebrity sauce," he said. "None of the packaging has my name. I wanted people to buy it because it's a great sauce."

Thanks to his famous parents, Peltz Beckham long ago learned the fine art of promotion. He made his modeling debut at 15, was an Adidas Originals endorser and Burberry photographer by 16, and has leant his name and face to a wide range of brands including Huawei, Pepe Jeans, and BMW.

On the food end, Peltz Beckham has hosted his own Facebook-based cooking show, Cookin' with Brooklyn, and is currently an ambassador for upmarket appliance maker Typhur. To popularize Cloud23, he has orchestrated tie-ins with brands on the same luxury perch as his own — thus far Jefferson's Bourbon and Langham Hotels. "Every deal I do, I try to add to personally," he said. "That's very important to build a brand. It gets into more hands, it gets into more doors, and you get people trying it."

Spoken like a true marketer. *Robert Klara*

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Sharon Price John
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Thank you for leading us in our
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With hugs from the Build-A-Bear team.

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Hall of Fame Marketer,
Author, and Creator and
CEO of Eve by Boz

WYCLEF JEAN
GRAMMY-Winning Artist,
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MORE SPEAKERS TO BE ANNOUNCED

The WNBA *and Its Players*

THE WNBA IS the envy of the sports world. The league kicked off 2024 with a class of superstar rookies including Caitlin Clark and Angel Reese; two months later, it secured a new media rights deal with Amazon, ESPN, and NBCUniversal worth roughly $2.2 billion. By the end of the season, more than 54 million unique viewers had watched games across linear TV and 2.35 million people had attended games. And the league is growing, with the Golden State Valkyries making their debut in 2025 by selling out every home game, the Portland Fire and Toronto Tempo coming in 2026, and new franchises set for Detroit, Cleveland, and Philadelphia.

Where the WNBA had roughly 80 nationally televised games in 2019, it now has more than 200, with ad buy-in from brands including Gatorade, State Farm, Nike, Mielle Organics, Reebok, Google, TJ Maxx, McDonald's, Skims, New Balance, and Delta. Franchise values have risen through the league's active outreach to fans, brands, and media, with the average WNBA team seeing its value increase 180% within the last year alone, per Sportic.

Now that the WNBA is in a period of hypergrowth, it must reckon with how it got there by ensuring its athletes are compensated fairly. Increasingly, those players are calling for wages in line with the WNBA's growing success and brand sponsorships. So while ADWEEK is heralding the WNBA for its immense branding success so far, the big test for the league and its leadership will be in sustaining that momentum and creating a business that elevates all who contributed to its growth and influence.

WNBA
Lilly
INDIANA
FEDERATED INSURANCE
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WNBA, RON HOSKINS/NBAE VIA GETTY IMAGES, JORDAN JOHNSON/NBAE VIA GETTY IMAGES, ADAM HAGY/NBAE VIA GETTY IMAGES

Kylie *Kelce*

PODCAST HOST, *Not Gonna Lie*

WHEN MUMMY PIG, the matron of popular British children's series Peppa Pig, wanted to announce her pregnancy in February, she turned to Kylie Kelce's podcast, Not Gonna Lie.

The mock interview was a culmination of a deal between Wave Sports & Entertainment — the media company behind Kelce's podcast — and Hasbro, exemplifying how Kelce has built a community using her lifestyle as a brand. Since launching the podcast in December, the high school field hockey coach and wife of retired NFL player Jason Kelce has used the podcast to dive into topics like parenthood, balancing a career, and how she manages a public life with big-name guests like Erin Andrews and Michelle Obama.

In the first week of the podcast's debut, Not Gonna Lie was the top-ranked show in the U.S, dethroning popular podcast host Joe Rogan. Since then, brands like Dunkin', Liquid Death, and Toyota have sponsored the show.

Kelce also shares life as a mom of four on Instagram to her 2.7 million followers. She's deeply involved in promoting women in sports, working with brands like Dove on an initiative called the Body Confident Sport program that aims to build confidence in teenage girl athletes.

When Kelce is not building a media company or spending time with her family, she is involved in philanthropic efforts like the Eagles Autism Foundation, a nonprofit aimed at providing resources and funding for people on the spectrum.

"I'll always find the time for this kind of stuff," Kelce told Good Morning America in February about her involvement with Eagles Autism Foundation. "This is what makes it worth it." *Lauren Johnson*

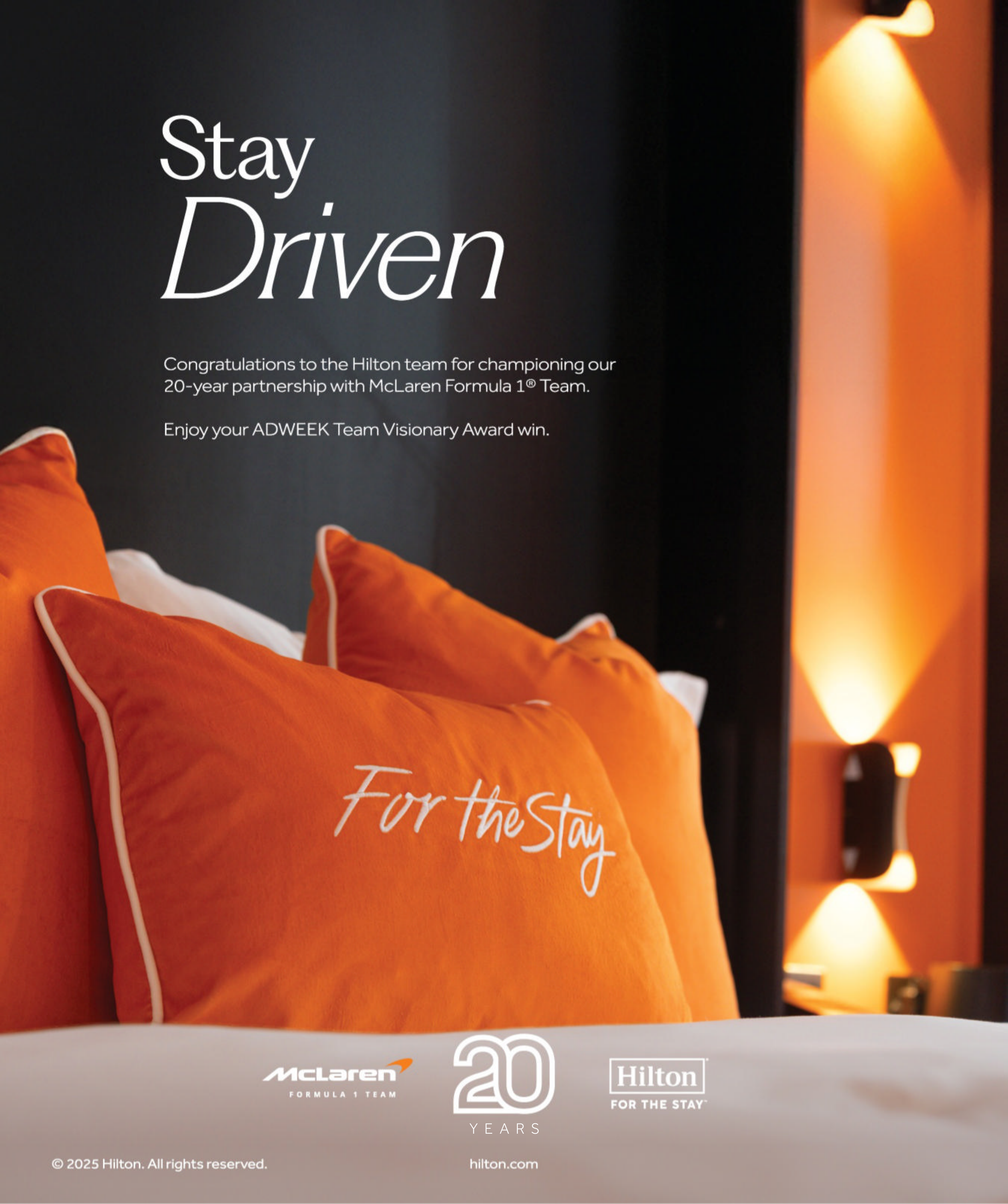
TEAM VISIONARY AWARDS

ADWEEK

Awards often recognize individuals. But building an iconic brand, developing a groundbreaking campaign, and tackling a difficult business challenge takes a team working together.

ADWEEK's inaugural Team Visionary Awards celebrate the collective effort behind some of our industry's biggest achievements. Whether it's a social team making the most of a viral moment or a tech team using data to cut acquisition costs, these 18 winners embody the truest tenet of our business: Nobody does it alone.

By Brandon Hardin



Stay
Driven

Congratulations to the Hilton team for championing our 20-year partnership with McLaren Formula 1® Team.

Enjoy your ADWEEK Team Visionary Award win.

McLaren
FORMULA 1 TEAM

20
YEARS

Hilton
FOR THE STAY™

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hilton.com

BBH USA

LEADERSHIP TEAM

STEVEN PANARIELLO
ERICA ROBERTS
SAMANTHA DEEVY
LINDSEY MCNABB

CALLING THEMSELVES THE Zag-onauts, the C-suite at BBH USA has embarked on a creative space race. They're steering the agency into bold new creative territory outside the boundaries of conventional thinking with a straightforward mandate: "When the world zigs, zag."

In just over a year, this team has delivered a 60% revenue surge, 31% headcount increase, and 14 new client assignments. Their win record includes PayPal, Goodyear, Hostess, Grey Goose, Bacardi, Patron, Hawaiian Tropic, Keurig Dr Pepper's 7Up, and Arby's, with a 95% RFI conversion rate.

Among the agency's 30 campaigns in 2024 were 15 product launches and two brand collaborations. Highlights such as PayPal's largest U.S. campaign "Everywhere" starring Will Ferrell to Hawaiian Tropic's viral "Tana Sutra" with Alix Earle demonstrate its cultural edge.

That comes from having a leadership team that reflects the changing demographics of consumers: 75% women and 25% LGBTQ+, leading a workforce that's 63% female and 34% BIPOC, backed by initiatives like Happiness Days that prioritize wellbeing. Together, they're proving that when leadership zags with conviction, the whole agency soars.

BBH USA

IPG MEDIABRANDS

LEADERSHIP TEAM

EILEEN KIERNAN
JUSTIN WROE
JARROD MARTIN
NICOLE ESTEBANELL
STACY DERISO
SUSAN KINGSTON-BROWN
ERIN QUINTANA
DAVID MATARANGLO

BOLD LEADERSHIP, SMART strategy, and inclusive culture are the foundation of IPG Mediabrands' success. Guided by the vision of global CEO Eileen Kiernan, the network completed a transformation that began in 2022 with a new operating model that empowers agencies UM, Mediahub, and Initiative to focus on client-specific innovation, while communities within the rest of the agency group advance the careers of IPG Mediabrands employees and the media discipline itself.

In the past year, the network won two landmark pitches with Amgen ($650 million) and Ulta Beauty ($400 million), while Mediahub, Initiative, and UM each added marquee clients like Etsy, Little Caesars, Netflix Australia, Alaska Airlines, and 7-Eleven. These wins helped IPG Mediabrands achieve the highest three-year growth rate (45%) in the industry, according to Recma, and earned Kiernan the title of Woman of the Year from She Runs It.

Innovation has been a priority as well. Kinesso launched Interact with Acxiom, transforming how brands engage audiences in real time. The group also introduced Mediabrands Health, winning Amgen just two months after launch. And IPG launched the Climate Action Accelerator Program to help clients reduce their media's carbon footprint — because the only successful business is a sustainable one.

IPGMEDIABRANDS

DISNEY+ AND HULU, THE WALT DISNEY COMPANY

IN-HOUSE TEAM

ASAD AYAZ
SHANNON RYAN
SAMANTHA ROSENBERG
BARRIE GRUNER

GIVEN THEIR BREADTH of content, Disney+ and Hulu's in-house marketing team doesn't have just one target demographic or message. From kid fare to science fiction and the steamy halls of TV's longest-running medical drama, they take a holistic approach with the audience at the heart of it all. Each platform maintains its own unique voice with their own powerhouse brands driven by campaigns that blend creativity, strategy, and deep platform expertise. The results tell the story: Disney+ and Hulu dominated the streaming charts in the first half of 2025 with three exclusive shows among the top five and secured 128 Emmy nominations.

Behind the numbers is a team culture rooted in agility and collaboration. This year, they played a pivotal role in launching Hulu on Disney+, delivering a witty integrated campaign that highlighted the unique contrast — and compatibility — of the two brands. They also tapped into nostalgia with Disney+'s "Throwback" campaign this summer, turning beloved classics into new cultural obsessions with influencer partnerships and experiential activations. On the Hulu side, the "Get Real" campaign redefined unscripted TV marketing with a social-first Get Real House, generating 400 million impressions in a single day.

JARREAU BROWN
A.P. CHANEY
TERIKA FASAKIN
HARRIOTT KELLY
CHRIS KEYES
JOSH KROO
DIANA LaBRECQUE
NATACHA McLEOD
RANDY MILLER
MICHAEL PADGETT
SAMANTHA SANDERS
KATE SCHAUFELBERGER
KEMAH TAH

SPRITE

IN-HOUSE TEAM

A.P. CHANEY
CHRIS KEYES
DIANA LABRECQUE
NATACHA MCLEOD
KEMAH TAH
JOSH KROO
TERIKA FASAKIN
SAMANTHA SANDERS
RANDY MILLER
JARREAU BROWN
MICHAEL PADGETT
HARRIOTT KELLY
KATE SCHAUFELBERGER

SPRITE HAS NEVER been content to simply stay in the grocery aisle. Since becoming the first brand to champion hip-hop in the 1980s, Sprite has stood proudly at the intersection of music, sport, and culture, building an authentic and inclusive legacy especially within Black and Brown communities. Today, that DNA continues to evolve for a new generation of soda drinkers, not as a mirror reflecting what's cool but actively driving culture forward.

In 2025, Sprite celebrated eight consecutive years of dollar and volume growth, recently surpassing Pepsi to become the No. 3 soft drink in the U.S. and ranks as the 16th most popular brand among Gen Z — not limited to beverages. During the 2024 holiday season, a campaign for Sprite's seasonal Winter Spiced Cranberry variety dressed up NBA star Anthony Edwards as Santa, becoming one of ADWEEK's Best Holiday Ads. Sprite also broke some new marketing ground last year by signing its first female athlete ambassador, Olympic champion Sha'Carri Richardson, and invested in women's sports through the new 3:3 basketball league Unrivaled.

And classic Sprite isn't the only flavor having a moment: The cherry-infused Sprite Chill became Coca-Cola's best-selling new product in 2024, while Sprite + Tea delivered 4.6 billion earned media impressions.

THE WALT DISNEY COMPANY, SPRITE

A FUTURE WITHOUT CHILDHOOD CANCER IS IN OUR HANDS

I STAND UP FOR
MYSELF!
STAND UP TO CANCER

Cancer is the leading disease-related cause of death among both children and adolescents.

Stand Up To Cancer is determined to change that by accelerating life-saving research and treatments.

I STAND UP FOR
MY DAUGHTER
STAND UP TO CANCER
STAND UP TO CANCER
I STAND UP FOR
MYSELF!
STAND UP TO CANCER

LEARN MORE

CAMERA · ZOOM · TAP

LEARN MORE

STAND UP TO CANCER®

Be part of the team that ends cancer at SU2C.org/PediatricFund.

Stand Up To Cancer is a 501(c)(3) charitable organization.

MCCANN CONTENT STUDIOS

SOCIAL MEDIA / INFLUENCER TEAM

MONICA TAILOR
CRYSTAL MALACHIAS

McCANN
MONICA TAILOR
Co-Managing Director McCann Content Studios
Chief Social Marketing Officer
CRYSTAL MALACHIAS
Co-Managing Director McCann Content Studios
Global Head of Influencer

MCCANN CONTENT STUDIOS was built to meet a clear industry need: treating social and influencer campaigns not as a side project, but as the core of modern brand building. Led globally by Monica Tailor and Crystal Malachias, the team combines strategy, creativity, community management, influencer marketing, production, and analytics into an end-to-end model that has become the agency network's biggest growth driver.

The team's approach is rooted in McCann's Truth Well Told philosophy, ensuring that every social idea begins with a real human insight and carries through consistently across channels. Instead of outsourcing or isolating social teams, McCann Content Studios integrates social strategy into brand platforms from the start to deliver speed, creative consistency, and measurable impact at scale.

That unified model has fueled remarkable momentum. In the past year alone, the studio secured over 30 new global client wins, including Aldi, L'Oréal Paris, Reckitt, Durex, Chick-fil-A, and SharkNinja, and expanded across McCann's top 15 markets.

Now the team is pushing the discipline forward with a new measurement model that moves beyond vanity metrics, plus AI tools that map a brand's full social footprint and track cultural shifts in real time.

Combining cutting-edge technology with human ingenuity, McCann Content Studios is building the kind of custom solutions that work in the modern fractured media landscape.

CREATOR DECK
Social Team
TYLER
LAN ANH
BRIANNA
THALIA
BOBBY
GEN Z
GEN Z
BILLENIAL
MILLENIAL
MILLENIAL

CREATOR DECK

SOCIAL MEDIA / INFLUENCER TEAM

BOBBY IZEVBIGIE
BRIANNA CIVITANO
TYLER TRAN
LAN ANH HUYNH
THALIA LEBLANC

THE CREATOR DECK Social Team has mastered the art of turning fleeting cultural moments into lasting brand impact. Women- and minority-led, the agency was born from the fashion influencer community and has evolved into a full-service firm helping brands like P.F. Chang's, Urban Decay, and Youth to the People authentically connect with Gen Z.

Under account supervisor Bobby Izevbigie, the team operates like an improv troupe: quick, collaborative, always ready with a "yes, and..." approach that keeps brands in sync with the zeitgeist. Their edge lies in cultural fluency, with a deep understanding of memes, shorthand, and social nuance paired with the agility to act fast before the moment slips away.

For P.F. Chang's, the team transformed a single TikTok comment into a multi-phase viral win, garnering over 1 million interactions, press coverage, and a long-term creator partnership. With Youth to the People, a witty real-time response to a viral moment with TikToker Sydney Benjamin fueled over 16 million views.

And when Urban Decay asked the team to identify new emerging creators, they took micro influencer Mallorie Workman to macro with more than 320,000 followers.

By blending instinct, speed, and strategy, Creator Deck proves that cultural moments aren't just for chasing — they're for shaping.

MCCANN, CREATOR DECK

Congratulations to the
ADWEEK Team Visionary honorees,
including our extraordinary
Disney+ and Hulu marketing team

Best In-House Team

Asad Ayaz • Shannon Ryan
Barrie Gruner • Samantha Rosenberg
& the entire award-winning team

Disney+ hulu

©Disney and its related entities

ONE X STUDIOS

CREATIVE TEAM

JEFF MEZA
MATTHEW SMITH
MA'AT ZACHARY
LEE HARRIS
BRANDON BOUKNIGHT
SOLEY BERRIOS
ASHER FLOWERS
KRISTINA D'AGUIAR
NICOLE VEAR

POWERFUL STORYTELLING STARTS at One X Studios, Urban One's award-winning branded content studio where culture and creativity intersect. Made up of designers, directors, producers, and strategists, the team is dedicated to illuminating untold stories with honesty, artistry, and purpose, guided by a "what's next" mindset.

In the past year, the team delivered campaigns focused on issues as diverse as men's health, food insecurity, and educational empowerment. "The Heart of the Matter" with Advil sparked essential dialogue about Black men's cardiac health, pairing hip-hop icon Doug E. Fresh with cardiologist Dr. Dave Montgomery to break down stigmas and encourage proactive care. With Feeding America and the Ad Council, "Bountyfull" highlighted food insecurity through chef Jernard Wells' personal story, turning a national issue into a narrative of resilience and education. And with AT&T's "Rising Future Makers: The Futurist," the team provided mentorship, resources, and financial support to HBCU students, empowering the next generation of innovators.

From the More Than That podcast to the Real Talk Drives Real Change tour, One X Studios is on a mission to tell stories in ways that inspire awareness, spark change, and create lasting impact.

REMEZCLA

CREATIVE TEAM

NEYLU LONGORIA
MORRIS DÁVILA
ANA CALAPA
DANIEL GONZALEZ
JENSIN ISENBERG
IVONNE RUIZ
RAFAEL URBINA

TO CONNECT WITH Latine audiences, Remezcla's creative team is modernizing how agencies partner with brands on campaigns with authenticity and depth that also benefit the community. Since its start as a digital magazine, Remezcla has helped brands like MLB, Tecate, ESPN Deportes, and Footlocker show up meaningfully in the lives of the fastest-growing U.S. consumer group.

What sets this team apart is its insistence that Latine audiences don't just want to be marketed to — they want to be understood and celebrated. Every campaign is built on cultural insights that unfold into meaningful narratives across digital, social, and physical channels.

For MLB's "El Béisbol Es Otra Cosa" campaign, the team looked at how Latinos have "remixed" America's pastime, narrated by singer Myke Towers and SNL's Marcello Hernandez, generating over 400 million impressions globally with 86% positive sentiment. With Cerveza Indio, the "Made with Ingenio Azteca" campaign drew a line from Aztec ancestral artistry to contemporary Mexican-American creativity, elevating beer into a platform for cultural storytelling. And ESPN Deportes' "Nombre Y Apellido" celebrates heritage by framing athletes' names as symbols of recognition and pride.

By fusing creativity with cultural truths, Remezcla is proving itself as a translator between U.S. brands and Latine audiences.

REMEZCLA

tinuiti
Joe O'Connor
Sr. Director of I&G
Bob Avellino
Sr. Director of I&G
Ben Plantz
Product Manager
Eric Hitchman
Sr. BI Developer
Judah McAuley
Director, Software Engineering
Pragith Prakash
Sr. DevOps Engineer
Jesse Aldrich
Sr. Technical Project Manager
Anna Shonia
BI Developer
Jonathan Cole
Sr. Manager, Commerce

TINUITI

TECH TEAM

JOE O'CONNOR
BOB AVELLINO
BEN PLANTZ
ERIC HITCHMAN
JUDAH MCAULEY
PRAGITH PRAKASH
JESSE ALDRICH
ANNA SHONIA
JONATHAN COLE

TINUITI'S MEGATRON TEAM was built with a clear mission: become the industry's leading experts in Amazon Marketing Cloud (AMC) and transform how brands connect with shoppers. By uniting stakeholders across product, technology, client delivery, innovation, and growth, the team links quantitative insights with creative strategy to deliver custom AMC solutions that scale into agency-wide products.

In just two years, Megatron has redefined what retail media innovation looks like. Their first major project supporting Sony's "For the Music" campaign reached 53.5 million Gen Z and millennial consumers with AMC-built custom audiences, boosting ROAS 75% above Amazon's category benchmark. With Blueair, the team protected search-heavy budgets by building six AMC audiences that drove 20% of sales at just 4% of spend, cutting new-to-brand acquisition costs by 68%. The work was featured at Amazon's Unboxed conference as a model for competitive advantage. And for The Honest Company, Megatron partnered with Amazon to pilot Flexible Shopping Insights, identifying over 20 audiences that lifted incrementality 20% above category leaders and cut acquisition costs by 52%.

As questions around incrementality testing and ID resolution become bigger topics in the industry, the team is continuing to work directly with Amazon to answer them.

LERMA/

TECH TEAM

FRANCISCO CARDENAS
RODOLFO RUIZ
PRANAV KUMAR
CHRISTEN JACQUOTTET

LERMA/'S DIGITAL AND Innovation team is showing how emerging technology can go beyond novel party tricks to become an ally to purpose-driven brands. Led by Francisco Cardenas, Rodolfo Ruiz, Pranav Kumar and Christen Jacquottet, this cross-functional group blends cultural fluency with technical craft to help brands and institutions do what's right, not performative gestures.

In the past year, the team has delivered work that shows how digital tools can build real connections. For The Salvation Army, they created the William Booth Bot, an internal AI strategist trained on the voice and mission of the organization's founder to ensure 160 years of values stay aligned with today's decisions. They also overhauled the nonprofit's sprawling digital ecosystem into a unified, user-centered design.

When He Gets Us launched its "Sick Of" campaign, Lerma/ built a participatory platform where more than 113,000 Americans across all 50 states shared what they were tired of, transforming raw sentiment into a living, data-driven portrait of collective emotion and driving measurable lifts in brand curiosity. And for the Hay Forum, the team created a pro bono AI experience called Talk B.I.G., which turned Instagram comments into real-time conversations with long-gone authors like George Orwell.

At Lerma/, technology isn't a gimmick. It's a bridge between people, purpose, and progress.

TINUITI, KATY MENDEZ /LERMA/, HILTON, MOMENTUM WORLDWIDE

HILTON

EXPERIENTIAL TEAM

KYLE D'ASCENZO
MATHIEU DEMARQUIS
RYAN KASPERSKI
KATIE MALLALIEU
VICTORIA THOROGOOD
KATHARINE ZIKE
BRITT FARRAR
ELIOTT GROSSMAN
MARIE SHETTERLEY

HILTON'S INTEGRATED CONTENT, Media, and Partnerships team has transformed hospitality into a stage for bold, human-centered storytelling. Instead of sticking to logos and placements, the team creates content-driven partnerships that tap directly into fandom, particularly with McLaren and driver Lando Norris. From a surprise birthday party in Las Vegas to Race Ready Yoga in Miami, Suite Rides in Monaco, and an art installation in Singapore, the campaigns generated over 500 million impressions and 99% positive sentiment, delivering a 2.5% lift in brand perception among zillennials.

That same spirit of creativity powers Hilton's Stay Like platform, which crafts immersive, one-of-a-kind travel experiences for pop culture fans. After launching Paris Hilton- and Wicked-themed suites, the team unveiled the Stay Like McLaren Racing suite complete with simulators, pit wall media hubs, and bespoke hospitality touches like smoothie delivery. The activation achieved Hilton's strongest global social engagement to date with 16.9 million views in its first two weeks.

And when it was time to bring its Stay on the Green activation to the U.S. after three international golf events, Hilton brought its premium hospitality to women's golf at the Solheim Cup.

By blending culture, sports, and travel, Hilton has set a new blueprint for experiential marketing and proved that where you stay truly matters.

MOMENTUM WORLDWIDE

EXPERIENTIAL TEAM

DAVID CHAMBERLAIN
NICOLE MILLER
HANNAH SMITH
JOSEPH GOURLEY
RACHEL MATTS
DANIEL LAU
LAUREN WAGNER
MADISON SCHUMACHER
COLETTE CARNEY
SIMONE CUTRI
MUOI LE
NICOLE MEYERSON
JOHN STOBIE
DREW BUFFKIN
HARPREET SINGH
ALAIN BABURAM
ADAER MELGAR
RILEY WOLF
EMMA LOUISE WEBB
KATHLEEN HARMON
MINA GURKAN
MICHELLE WU
CHIARA FIORI
BURAK OZCAN
KRISTA GRANT
DEVIN KELLY
TAMAR NAJARIAN
SYRRAH LEE
GRAHAM CAULFIELD
CATHERINE CARRIERE
TIZE VALENTE
ALEXIS ONIGBANJO
IAN BAKER
CODY KING
JO HE LEE
BRENDAN ROBSON
ALEX BOWMAN
RYAN BREEN
ELIZABETH GATLIN
STACY SU
SAYEE AMBEKAR

MOMENTUM WORLDWIDE'S EXPERIENTIAL Design team are expertly melding physical, digital, and cultural spaces into activations that deliver both unforgettable memories and real business impact.

In the past year, they've made waves by reimagining Barbie's Dreamhouse as a Verizon-powered Streamhouse in New York's SoHo. At Coachella, they launched festivalgoers into the fiery world of Korean instant noodle brand Buldak with spicy challenges and celebrity cameos. For Coca-Cola, they used AI to help consumers visualize the flavors of Coke Spiced, generating GIFs, films, and massive earned media.

Beyond headline-grabbing activations, the team is shaping the future with three AI patents and proprietary machine learning systems that creative intelligent experiences as part of Momentum's Total Brand Experience offering.

By embedding accessibility, sustainability-certified workflows, and cultural resonance into every touch point, Momentum's team has risen to one of the most awarded experiential teams in the world, helping brands connect with consumers in ways that are meaningful to both.

ADVERTISING & PARTNERSHIPS DIVISION NBCUNIVERSAL

MEDIA TEAM

MARK MARSHALL
ALISON LEVIN
KAREN KOVACS
RYAN MCCONVILLE
GINA REDUTO
JOHN ALLEVA
JEFF HOEH
CAITLIN GALO
ALEXA LEVITT
TRISH VEGA

NBCUNIVERSAL'S ADVERTISING & Partnerships Division is one of the most powerful forces in global media, with nearly 2,000 employees with skills spanning adtech, creative, research, production, and sales. It's the kind of all-inclusive package that clients of every size need in today's rapidly evolving media landscape.

In 2024, the division shattered records at the Paris Olympic and Paralympic Games, generating the highest ad revenue in Games history by opening it to smaller advertisers to buy ads programmatically for the first time. Nearly 70% of sponsors were new to the Olympics, with almost $500 million coming from first-time advertisers. NBCU also debuted Virtual Concessions in partnership with Instacart, an industry-first shoppable TV format that delivered brand recall 48% above retail norms.

The team also drove innovation with One Platform Total Audience, an AI-driven cross-platform planning tool that produced measurable gains in purchase intent, search engagement, and incremental store visits. And with Saturday Night Live's 50th season, they sold out all inventory and secured the show's first-ever Presenting Sponsors across linear, digital, and social.

NBCUniversal is heading into another potentially banner year, hosting the FIFA World Cup, the Milan 2026 Winter Olympics, the return of the NBA to NBC, and more. And the Advertising & Partnerships team will be ready to set new industry benchmarks for creativity, technology, and commercial impact.

COTY TARR/NBCUNIVERSAL, AMC NETWORKS

AMC NETWORKS

MEDIA TEAM

CHIMA OGBUOKIRI
KEVIN FITZGERALD
SYLVIA GEORGE

CHARGED WITH DRIVING engagement and retention across more than 10 distinct linear and streaming brands, the AMC Networks media team rejects one-size-fits-all playbooks in favor of deeply targeted, genre-driven approaches that resonate with passionate communities.

This precision has fueled standout success. Acorn TV achieved its biggest month in history in the past year with the Murder Mystery May campaign, driving record viewership of 20 million hours and a 70% YoY surge in subscriber acquisition. With Shudder, the group transformed the horror streamer's Halloween spike into year-round fandom through the Season of Screams campaign, live watch parties, and interactive fan events like Halloween Hotline, cementing loyalty among one of entertainment's most devoted audiences.

At the franchise level, the team reinvigorated The Walking Dead Universe with campaigns for each of its three spinoff series, while simultaneously building the Anne Rice Immortal Universe into a breakout cultural force.

Nimble, data-smart, and relentlessly audience-first, the AMC Networks media team has perfected building lasting fandoms in a crowded media landscape.

You see them everywhere.

MCS sees it all.

Congrats, visionaries!

McCANN
Content Studios

MONICA TAILOR
Chief Social Marketing Officer
& Co-Managing Director,
McCann Content Studios

CRYSTAL MALACHIAS
Global Co-Managing Director
McCann Content Studios

CAPE

NEWCOMER TEAM

CASEY RITTS
PETE GOSSELIN
MIMI POWELL

FOUNDED IN EARLY 2024, Cape may be new but its leadership has extensive experience of the agency world — and what they want to see done differently.

Havas veterans Casey Ritts, Pete Gosselin, and Mimi Powell built Cape on the foundational tenets of trust, results, and relationships over headlines. To stay true to those values, the agency operated in stealth mode for its first year; by the time it officially launched in April, Cape had already secured blue-chip clients including BetMGM and Prudential, an AOR assignment with TradeStation, and a reputation for measurable impact.

Amid an agency world in flux, Cape eschews fixed departments for chemistry-led teams for every assignment. CCO Gosselin created what he calls the Modular Creative Approach, a proprietary system that produces agile, testable content that can be optimized in real time with AI folded into every step of the process, from intelligence to media precision and production.

To oversee it all, Powell built the agency's operations to be flexible and purposeful, creating an environment where talent can thrive and clients get exactly the team they need. Cape now operates with a 25-strong staff that boasts a 100% new business win rate.

CAPE

NICE&FRANK

NEWCOMER TEAM

NEYLU LONGORIA
MORRIS DÁVILA
ANA CALAPA
DANIEL GONZALEZ
JENSIN ISENBERG
IVONNE RUIZ
RAFAEL URBINA

IN AN INDUSTRY often fueled by ego and speed, nice&frank has become one of the fastest-growing new agencies by anchoring everything in two deceptively simple values — and put them right in its name.

Founded in late 2022 by creative leader Laura Petruccelli and strategist Graham North, nice&frank's ethos shows up in the processes the duo designed to shake up the agency model. FrankShop, a six-week strategy sprint culminating in a C-Suite offsite, helps leadership crack a brand platform that can guide an organization for years. The unconventional method has attracted a broad spectrum of clients including PepsiCo, Blackstone, Amazon, Stanford University, and the San Francisco Giants.

Meanwhile, FrankStorm, a culture-fueled creative sprint, breaks down walls between client and agency teams, sparking finely honed ideas at radical speed. It powered Oura Ring's first-ever 360 campaign, launched in just 12 weeks, spanning OOH, experiential activations, and a film that aired during the NBA Playoffs.

Offbeat as it may all sound, the co-founders have $7 million in receipts to prove that kindness and honesty aren't just good values — they're a growth strategy, fostering the kind of collaboration, speed, and bravery that modern attention-earning marketing demands.

NCE&FRANK

WALMART | PUBLICIS

CLIENT TEAM

TRAVIS PARR
MOLLY CRAWFORD
ROBERT CLIFTON JR.
RICKY VIOR
DANIEL ARENAS

WALMART'S CREATIVE FIREPOWER comes from Publicis Groupe's cross-agency team representing five shops operating as one seamless unit. In the past year alone, lead creatives Travis Parr, Molly Crawford, Robert Clifton Jr., Ricky Vior, and Daniel Arenas have created hundreds of campaigns, all with the goal of placing the retailer at the center of culture in ways that blur the line between entertainment and commerce.

The work ranged from nostalgic celebrity tie-ins to immersive tech moments, each designed to spark conversation while driving sales. Among the standouts: Deals of Desire, a 10-part dramatic miniseries that turned holiday shopping into binge-worthy entertainment with stars like Anthony Ramos and Lisa Rinna. "Background Joys" transformed the rising trend of ambient holiday videos into interactive, shoppable experiences across YouTube and CTV, making Walmart part of consumers' daily rituals. And "Who Knew" — a new brand platform launched in June with Walton Goggins and Stephanie Beatriz — reintroduced Walmart's expansive offerings to audiences in English and Spanish with humor and heart.

Beyond their creative output, what sets this team apart is their culture. With egos checked at the door, strategy, creative, and account leaders sit side-by-side in Publicis' New York office, united by a single goal: to meet customers where they are with content that's relatable and entertaining.

PREMIER NUTRITION COMPANY | EXVERUS MEDIA

CLIENT TEAM

TASHA DAY
MIRANDA JOHNSON
HUY PHAM
LORUS SAMO
MAYA DHAIRYWAN
STARLA BIRNBAUM
SEAN EDWARDS
RYAN SCHUSTER
CHRIS CHEEVER
CLARA BARSOOM
JORDAN KELIGOND
JENICA REVILLA
BENJI SHEPHERD
AARON SILVA
CHARLES LAI

MANAGING THE LARGEST account on Exverus Media's roster is no small feat. The Premier Nutrition Company (PNC) media team has grown alongside the business, overseeing flagship products Premier Protein's eight-figure annual spend and Dymatize's seven-figure presence across more than a dozen channels. The team balances full-funnel media strategy, performance marketing, and analytics, as well as collaborating with creative and public relations partners.

Led by Tasha Day, a 19-year media veteran who's helped fuel Exverus' 73% growth in three years, the team combines deep expertise with fresh perspective. From Media Buyer to Watch honoree Lorus Samo to longtime brand partner Miranda Johnson and creative ace Huy Pham, each member brings unique value while sharing a common drive to elevate the business beyond short-term wins.

The team maintains a strong balance between long-term brand building and immediate conversions. Premier Protein's first national media campaign in five years led to an eight-point lift in brand favorability and drove YoY sales surges at Amazon (263%) and Walmart (541%). Innovation in adtech saw the Exverus team partner with SeenThis to launch Social Reach, a first-to-market PubMatic ad format that outperformed Meta by 50% in cost efficiency. Add in back-to-back-to-back Prime Day wins since 2023, new product launches, and an upcoming full brand refresh, and this team proves it's doing more than managing media strategy — it's shaping the future of PNC.

PUBLICIS, EXVERUS MEDIA

FARE

In a food allergy emergency, epinephrine saves lives.

For 33 million Americans, one bite can turn into a life-threatening reaction. And too often, they don't have the one thing that could save them: epinephrine.

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TBWA\MEDIA ARTS LAB

Looking back on 20 years of Apple's marketing legacy, and what's next.

By Brittaney Kiefer

MAL's creative leader, Brent Anderson (left), and CEO Katrien De Bauw (right)

AFTER TAKING THE helm of Apple's dedicated agency, TBWA\Media Arts Lab, in 2016, global chief executive Katrien De Bauw and global chief creative officer Brent Anderson went to lunch with the agency's founder and legendary creative leader Lee Clow.

Clow, who established TBWA\Media Arts Lab (MAL) in 2006, is most famous for helping to redefine Apple's advertising with campaigns such as "1984," which introduced Macintosh computers, and "Think Different" in 1997.

After hearing Clow's stories of collaborating with the late Apple co-founder Steve Jobs, De Bauw left that meeting with a sense of trepidation. "I could really feel the weight," she said. "You walk in standing on the shoulders of giants. It comes with a huge responsibility."

De Bauw and Anderson have led MAL for almost half of its existence, having started at the agency within a day of each other. Over those 10 years, they've helped MAL expand both its global presence and the type of work it does for Apple, while aiming to raise its creative game. Earlier this year, as evidence of their achievements, Cannes Lions named Apple its Creative Marketer of the Year.

However, the pressure remains high to keep pace with Apple's constant evolution.

"The MAL organization has changed to be able to deliver what Apple needs today, but also what we think it may need tomorrow," De Bauw said. "If you only deliver what the client's asking, then you're always a little behind. You've got to take some chances and risks."

A FOUNDATION OF TRUST

MAL's origins can be traced back to the storied friendship and creative partnership between Jobs and Clow, who was previously creative director at Chiat/Day, where he oversaw the "1984" ad.

Jobs, who was "unrelenting in his vision for Apple and his expectation for [its] advertising and marketing," came to rely upon "Clow's pure creative expression and ability to simplify and reduce," Anderson said.

Clow proposed the idea of setting up a bespoke agency for Apple as the brand was preparing for a big milestone: the launch of the first iPhone in 2007. "There was a need for a coordinated launch across multiple markets for the iPhone, the likes of which had never been seen before," Anderson said. "It had to be flawless."

Jobs was receptive to the idea, with one stipulation: that he continue to work with Clow and talent from Chiat/Day. And so, MAL was born.

Though Jobs died in 2011 and Clow retired in 2019, MAL is still based on a similar "relationship of trust and dedication to [Apple's] mission," Anderson said. Many of the practices that Clow and his team established nearly 20 years ago, such as regular meetings with senior Apple executives to discuss the brand's challenges and future, persist today.

Aside from MAL, the tech giant also has an internal creative studio called Apple Marcom, behind campaigns such as Apple TV+'s stunt in Grand Central Station earlier this year for its hit show Severance. MAL and Marcom get separate briefs from Apple marketing leader Tor Myhren, fostering a "healthy competition" between the two entities, according to Anderson.

Even with an in-house studio, Apple sees the value in maintaining a partnership with an external agency, De Bauw explained. With an office in Los Angeles, MAL is physically separate from Apple, which is based in Cupertino. Apple turns to MAL for an independent perspective.

"We're the outsiders on the inside," De Bauw said. "[Myhren] wants us to push back, question, and bring consumers' point of view into Apple to make the right decisions about whatever we're working on. He'll sit us down and say, 'This needs to be fixed.' And we do the same with them."

As Apple has grown into the giant it is today, so, too has MAL's footprint: The agency now has offices in Los Angeles, London, Miami, Shanghai, Singapore, Sydney, Tokyo, and Seoul. International teams have created lauded work, such as a music video for K-pop group Aespa, a manga adaptation, Lucha Libre films in Mexico, and a dark comedy directed by Korean filmmaker Park Chan-wook.

"We have offices around the world with unbelievable talent that delivers quality work no matter where you are. That didn't exist 10 years ago," De Bauw said.

PIONEERING STORYTELLING

Lately, MAL has been busy crafting a new form of storytelling with Apple. Collaborating with Marcom, the agency has created films and series that demonstrate Apple Immersive Video, a technology designed for virtual reality viewing that uses 3D video and spatial audio to place viewers in the center of the scene. Apple has released six immersive experiences, including a music video for The Weeknd and a concert experience with Metallica. Next up is an immersive horror film.

"Those experiences became a demonstration of a foundationally new way of telling stories," Anderson said. "All the rules have changed."

Apple's technological evolution may be changing some rules, but for MAL, a few principles will always remain the same. The team learned those from Apple: the importance of experimentation, craft, emotional storytelling—and, above all, according to Anderson: "Clear and simple wins every time."

BRITTANEY KIEFER *is the creativity editor at* **ADWEEK**.

"1984"

The ad that redefined Apple's advertising, created by Lee Clow.

"LIFE IS BUT A DREAM"

Director Park Chan-wook's 2022 take on "Shot on iPhone."

"EARTH — SHOT ON IPHONE"

Apple's warning not to cross Mother Nature for Earth Day 2019.

SUBMERGED

Apple Immersive Video's first feature film, for Apple Vision Pro.

MARIONA VILARÓS, APPLE

Hiking Toward Serenity

VML global CEO Jon Cook's best weekends are spent in the Rockies. ***By Eva Kis***

JON COOK

JON COOK SPENDS his weeks running one of the largest agency networks in the world. But on as many weekends as the global CEO of VML can get away, Cook trades holding company duties for hiking boots and heads to the mountains.

Cook and his wife, Lisa, keep a small cabin in the woods near Estes Park, Colorado, just 15 minutes from the gates of Rocky Mountain National Park. It's not a short trip from his home base in Kansas City — about an eight-hour drive — but when the mountains call, he answers. "I'm really bad about taking time off. What I'm really good at is maximizing weekends there," he says. "I have become elite level at figuring out how to get there for a weekend," even if it means flying in from London in time to hit the trails on Saturday morning.

Cook traces his passion back to when his three daughters attended summer camp in Colorado where hiking was a core part of the experience. "Seeing hiking through their eyes, and then my wife and I doing our own hikes on the back of taking them to and from camp, opened up my eyes to how accessible it is and how zen it can make you feel," he recalls. Now, they go as often as they can between May and November, before the snow arrives.

Cook also makes hiking part of longer family trips, checking off national parks like Yellowstone and Grand Teton as well as the Swiss Alps. "They seem more fairytale to me," he says of Switzerland's mountains. "It just seems like an artist came down and put waterfalls everywhere, whereas in Colorado it still feels beautiful but a little more haphazard."

On his bucket list? The Rockies' 58 famed 14ers, the 14,000-foot peaks that lure ambitious hikers. "My goal is to stay fit enough to knock off as many 14ers as I can," he says.

Don't picture Cook with crampons and grappling hooks though. His idea of a perfect day in the mountains plays out more like a rugged walk: a three- to four-hour trek with Lisa covering between 4 and 6 miles at a conversational pace, followed by a hearty meal at a nearby town. "The hiking is sort of an excuse to go into little mountain towns and find their best breweries, pizza shops, coffee shops, art galleries," he laughs.

Family remains central to these outings. With his daughters now grown and scattered across Los Angeles, Boulder, and New York, schedules are difficult to coordinate, so he often hikes with one of them at a time. One memorable hike took place in the early days of the pandemic after his eldest daughter flew in from New York. Unsure of what was unfolding in the world, they set off together with a six-pack of Coors Light tucked into a backpack and drank them sitting by a stream. "It was the perfect hike at the perfect time," he says. "I think that's how Coors Light was intended to be enjoyed."

Beyond the scenery, exercise, and discoveries along the way, for Cook hiking is about the connections forged on the trail. He and Lisa discuss anything from dinner plans to the weightiest topics of the world. During a family gathering over the summer, his school-age nieces and nephews hiked alongside Cook's 82-year-old father. Even fellow hikers they meet on the trail are happy to strike up a conversation.

"Everybody just seems friendlier," he says. "You're all there for the hike, and I love that." ■

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